

"THE BANDWAGON"

--The Official Publication of the Circus Historical Society.--

VOL. 1 No. 7

Page 1

May, 1942

A SEASON WITH R. T. RICHARDS CIRCUS 1917 (second instalment)
by F. M. Farrell, Ithaca, N.Y.

Richard T. Ringling was the owner of the show and Sam McCracken was Manager. He had been manager of the Barnum & Bailey circus for a number of years after it came under the Ringling ownership. Bernie Head and Billy Backel were on the advance; Eddie Delevan front door; Bill Cronin, 24 hour man; Art Eldridge equestrian director; Captain Doolley, Supt. of Elephants; Steve Lloyd, Supt. of Baggage stock; Mr. Emery, Steward. Jack Warren was side show manager, the early part of season, Bill Walsh taking his place at Troy, N.Y., early in June. There were other executives, but I cannot recall their names.

Some of the acts on the show that I remember were Dunbar, Banvard and Dunbar, aerialists; Paul Johannings performing lions; Corriea troupe of bareback riders; Arthur Eldridge, performing Arabian stallions and trained Shetland ponies; Princess Florines comedy bears and trained giant dogs; Capt. Doolley 5 performing elephants; Larch-Florez acrobats; Cray Felix, French Clown; Guice Troupe of bareback riders; Hart sisters Aerialists; Rose E. Sullivan and Mrs. Eldridge equestriennes; Two Walters horizontal bars. There were other acts and clowns but I don't recall their names.

In the side show were Nabor Felix, Indian and clay molder, George Cole, Miss Emery, Mrs. Lloyd, Mrs. Cole; Miss Edna and "Congo", the Congo Warrior in sports and pastimes of his native land; and myself doing my three acts and lecturing on the other acts. There were a couple of acts on part of the season, but don't just remember the names. Anyway the show pleased the customers in cities and villages which it visited during the tenting season.

The big top was a 90 ft with a 50 middle, and used one ring and a steel arena for the wild animal acts. The menagerie was a 70 with 4 - 30 ft middle pieces. They put the baggage stock (that is, as many head as they had room for) down each side, and this was the imposing Horse Fair, as advertised. The cages were placed in the centre, the elephants and camels at the further end from the front door. They also had a horse tent for the stock not shown in the menagerie tent.

The show opened the season in Dover, N.J., Thurs. May 10th., (1917) Morristown May 11th and May 12th in Caldwell, N.J. The show moved Sunday A.M. to Jersey City, ferried to 23rd street New York City and into Yonkers, N.Y., for a two day stand.

The show made one day stands the rest of the week and was in early enough to start the afternoon performances on time, and Sunday, May 20th was in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., where they showed Monday, and the parade was out for the first time. Tues., May 22nd it rained in the morning and short on working men, the show was late getting into Ossining where they gave a night show only. Wed., the show was billed for Peekskill. It rained in the morning and the show didn't get into Peekskill until 5 p.m. Short on help they were going to pass up the night show but the natives wanted to see the show, so they put it up and started the evening performance at 9:35 p.m. to a full house.

The show was in early the balance of the week. Sunday, May 27th the show was in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and showed Monday. It rained all Sunday afternoon and all day Monday. The lot was soft after so much rain so the show had a late arrival in Rhinebeck, N.Y., on the 29th. Tivoli, N.Y., was the Decoration Day stand. The show was in early, but the lot was under water and with no other lot available the show lost the day.

The show was too heavy for a wagon show. The wagons were as big as some Railroad shows carried. The season of 1917 was like 1941. All shows short on working men, with all factories working night and day getting out war material. There were signs on all factories, "Help Wanted". Working men would join out and stay a week or two, and perhaps three weeks then quit to go to work in a factory, but there was enough of experienced help that stayed the season, so that the show moved every day.

The show decided to use more trucks so they billed Troy, N.Y., for a week stand and changed some of the heavy loads on to trucks, sending some of the horses back to Winter Quarters.

The show's Monday stand was Mechanicsville, N.Y. It rained Sunday and it also rained Monday forenoon clearing for the afternoon performance, but started raining again at night after the performance and the lot was a sea of mud Tues. a.m. It was 2 p.m. when the last wagon got off the lot. This was the pole wagon and as the drivers had to make a short turn on the road, the wagon tipped over, causing another delay, as the wagon had to be unloaded, tipped up and reloaded. So when the pole wagon was off the lot, we, the performers, started for Valley Falls, N.Y., which was Tuesday, June 12 stand.

The horses were all tired out from pulling the wagons out of the mud in Mechanicsville, so they didn't get into Valley Falls, until midnight. Wednesday, June 13th stand was Hoosick Falls, N.Y. The side show, cook house and some trucks got in alright but the rest of the show didn't get in until 10 p.m. That made two days lost. They wanted to use the side show carryall, so Sam McCracken, the Manager, told me to take the side show people via train to North Adams, Mass., and wait there for the show, as they would pass up Williamstown, Mass. and go direct into North Adams, which was Friday, June 15th stand, where the afternoon performance started on time. Sat., June 16th stand was Adams, Mass., where the parade was put out again and performances on time.

The show spent the Summer in New England and moved every day on time, and for the balance of the season, except a few stands late in the season.

(to be concluded in next issue)

"THE AUCTION COLUMN"

While the results of the first CHS Auction were satisfactory, still we would like to see more members send in bids. Following are some new items donated by members for the good of our society. Please send your bids to CHS Secretary, Jack Lyon, 22-A Charles St., Guleph, Ont., Canada. But hold money until advised of your purchase.

- Lot 1: Miscellaneous assortment of Circus tickets, Route cards, Couriers, photos, etc., (Value \$3-\$5) - Postage extra.
- Lot 2: One gilt wood "Rosette" carving from parade wagon burned at Peru Winterquarters 1941. (Postage extra) Both these fine Lots donated by Don Smith.
- Lot 3: "Struggles and Triumphs" or 40 years a Showman. Recollections of P.T. Barnum. Pub. Buffalo 1873. Over 800 pages. A book that all collectors should have. Many fine illustrations. Donated by W. W. Tyson.

All bids should be in Jack's hands by June 25th.

PHOTOS: Collectors! - Don't fail to contact F.M. Farrell, 208½ Esty St., Ithaca, N.Y., for further R.T. Richards Circus photos.

AND please remember too, that Walter Pietschmann, CHS Treasurer, will have some fine circus and presentation photos to offer you of the Terrell Jacobs Show. Drop him a line now!

WAGON SHOW SPIRIT STILL EXISTS! - By Don Smith.

On May 1st 1942, King Bros., Circus, America's newest show, and owned by Allen King, famous Wild Animal Trainer, opened in Plymouth, Mich., to a full house. Big Top is of new white canvas with narrow horizontal stripe of blue, with marquee of similar design. Top has two centre poles and one large ring, and there are also a menagerie, (or horse tent) and side show. Trucks and trailers are very neat in red, white, and blue horizontal stripes, and yellow letters edged in black. All wardrobe is new and very flashy.

During the first evening show, the temporary light plant balked, and left audience in semi-darkness, with program drawing to a close. Requests for lights brought immediate action from visiting CHS members and this writer and one other drove our cars into the tent, throwing headlights across the ring. With the aid of my flashlight, Miss Mickey King, Star Aerialist, ascended to the tent top and went through her act, to end the show, doing her full 100 arm planges, with great applause.

Next day the show moved to Dearborn and CHS members Head & Pietschmann of Detroit, Meyers of Ann Arbor, and Don Smith of Farmington were on the lot early to greet them. Walt had to leave early, but the rest of us worked most of the day, helping to erect tents in a high wind. It should be noted here that Miss Mickey King also helped in every part of setting up for the days performance, and few men on the lot worked any harder than she, to lace the top, brace the quarter poles, and put up the side walls. She jokingly called Meyers and myself, her "Big Top Gang", and we all got quite a kick out of it. Members of the Zavatta Riding Troupe also assisted in all ways, as did Ernie Stewart, Contortionist, and Bobby Gordon, wire act. So much for performers, but you should have seen Allen King, the owner & Manager work! He was all over the place, not swinging a cane or bellowing at the men, as is so common; but helping with ropes, poles, canvas, seats, etc., and working on his light plant, and tending to the office all at once.

All this, as you may have guessed, due to the extreme shortage of labor, on account of the War. However, with such a fine show, and such a spirit of co-operation, this newest of Circuses cannot help but succeed, and we are mighty proud the way those CHS members pitched in to help, with no thought of accepting passes for their labor. You may be sure it was greatly appreciated by Allen King. (Oh, yes, the clowns, those first two nights, were Mickey MacDonald of S-F, H-W, Cole etc., Jean LeRoy, Cole Bros., and Herbie Head and Don Smith, C.H.S.!)

C.H.S. Members -- note: Future issues of the Bandwagon will be published and mailed by Walter W. Tyson and Jack Lyon from Guelph, Ontario, with the valuable assistance of Don Smith lending a hand at editing in his usual efficient manner. We believe this change will serve to bring you more frequent issues, with no loss of quality or interest in the articles contained therein. This has been necessity mainly because of long hours now worked by Don, and inability to set up copy and meet our deadlines. Trusting you will bear with us during this change, and promising better things to come.

C.H.S. Members will find two photos enclosed with this issue of The Bandwagon. One of these, the PAWNEE BILL SHOW beautifully carved Bandwagon, goes with a previously printed article on this show. Negative from Don Smith.

The other photo is of the R.T.RICHARDS CIRCUS (1917) and was kindly loaned by the author of this most interesting article, another instalment of which appears in this copy of the Bandwagon. These are good samples of the photos in store for CHS members in future.

TERRELL JACOBS WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS

For the first time in history the people of the City of Guelph, had the opportunity to see a circus and it's personalities for longer than one day, when the Terrell Jacobs Wild Animal Circus played here for the week on the Conklin Shows from May 18th to 23rd.

The shows came here from Hamilton, where they had opened the season, arriving here Sunday, May 17th at 2: p.m. Walter Tyson and Jack Lyon CHS were on hand to meet the train, and to photograph the arrival and unloading, which started at 4 o'clock. A slight mishap occurred at this time, when one of the Jacobs lion cages accidentally separated from the truck which was hauling it to the lot, and ran down a slight hill, colliding with a parked car, but damage to either vehicle was very slight, although the lions roared loudly. In addition to this trouble the show had the misfortune to have one of the lions die of pneumonia; and also during the week it was necessary for Dr. Cote, well known local veterinarian, to perform a successful operation on another lion.

On Monday evening, the President of the Conklin Shows, Mr. J. W. (Patty) Conklin, was visited by the President and Secretary, and a very enjoyable chat was had. Mr. Conklin gave some of the experiences which were encountered during the course of piloting a great show during war years. It was also through his kindness that the two CHS members were introduced to Terrell Jacobs.

During the week, many visits were made to the circus, and fine times had with the Owner and other personnel of the show. Especially we might mention Bill Woodcock, well known to CHS members, who is in charge of the elephants on the show. On Wednesday evening a presentation of Honorary Membership in CHS was made to Terrell Jacobs, before a large crowd under the big top. Dolly Jacobs was the recipient of a beautiful bouquet of roses, on behalf of the CHS. The presentation address was read by Pres. Tyson with Secretary Lyon assisting. Due to existing conditions other CHS members could not be present, with the exception of Walter Pietschmann, Treas., of CHS who made a special trip from Detroit to photograph the circus and the presentation.

Wednesday afternoon the CHS members were given the freedom of the lot to photograph anything and everything. Bill Woodcock brought his charges out, and many photos were taken of them in special poses. Excellent shots were also obtained of the Cinderella wagon, which was uncovered specially for the members. This wagon was overhauled, and repainted by Jacobs, and in spite of its sixty years, looks like a new wagon.

After the final performance Wed. evening, much time was spent with Bill Woodcock in the menagerie, and much information obtained from him relative to circus history. Pietschmann had brought a number of his excellent circus photos with him, and these were enjoyed by all. Walt. had the distinction of photographing the Jacobs' Twins, having their first elephant ride.

The appearance of the wagons and equipment, including the Show Front made a very fine appearance. The cage containing the three Leopards had been on the Sells-Floto Circus, and had been rebuilt, with the addition of original carvings from den on Haag Wagon Show. The small cross-cage (Cockatoos) has been rebuilt, but had been originally on the Gentry Dog and Pony Circus. The large dens containing the Lions and Tigers are 20 ft. and brand new. The carvings on same are from Hagenbeck-Wallace wagons originally executed by Geo. Graf's Uncle. Gears on these wagons are made by Sullivan-Eagle Works in Peru, Ind.

Weather for the week was very cold and rainy, but taking this into consideration, the attendance was good. Everything was done by Terrell and Dolly to make the visits of the CHS members, long to be remembered. Terrell Jacobs made it understood that he would be pleased to meet CHS members anywhere and at any time.

(Description of programme will follow in next issue of Bandwagon).